

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 13792 171525Z

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8450

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 13792

CALCUTTA 2299 FOLLOWS SENT TO NEW DELHI FOR ACTION ON 16 SEP 76.
BEING RPTD FOR YOUR INFO.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 2299

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJ: CHIEF MINISTER RAC

REF: CALCUTTA 2268

1. WITH THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS' BIG CONCLAVE IN DELHI STILL SCHEDULED FOR THIS SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 18, THE CONSENSUS HERE IS THAT CHIEF MINISTER RAY'S POSITION IS STRONG. THE CHIEF MINISTER'S ADVERSARIES ARE DESCRIBED AS DOWNCAST OVER THE FAILURE OF THEIR EFFORTS THESE PAST WEEKS TO OUST HIM AND MORE OR LESS RESIGNED TO THE PROSPECT OF HIS CONTINUING IN OFFICE. HOWEVER THEY HAVE NOT ENTIRELY GIVEN UP, WE ARE TOLD, AND STILL HOPE TO PUT CURBS ON RAY'S POWERS. THE VEHICLE FOR THIS WOULD BE THE CREATION OF A COMMITTEE FOR "COORDINATION OF ACTIVITIES OF THE GOWB AND THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS." THIS WOULD BE A FIVE OR SIX MEMBER BODY COMPOSED OF RAY, WEST BENGAL CONGRESS PRESIDENT MOITRA, GOWB POWER MINISTER GHANI KHAN CHAUDHURY, GOI MINISTER OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS OM MEHTA, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 NEW DE 13792 171525Z

AND ONE OR TWO OTHERS, POSSIBLY GOI COMMERCE MINISTER CHAT-

TOPADHYAYA AND/OR BANKING MINISTER MUKHERJEE. IF AN OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE WERE FORMED THE KEY QUESTION WOULD BE WHO WOULD CHAIR IT. RAY WOULD PRESUMABLY INSIST ON THAT PREROGATIVE, BUT HIS OPPONENTS ARE TALKING ABOUT ITS GOING TO OM MEHTA, SANJAY GANDHI'S MAN. THIS WOULD GIVE SANJAY A SORT OF SUPERVISORY ROLE AND VETO IN WEST BENGAL AFFAIRS, THROUGH THE INTERMEDIARY OF OM MEHTA, AND WOULD ASSUAGE THE WOUNDS SANJAY'S VANITY ALLEGEDLY SUSTAINED IN THE LOSS OF THE STRUGGLE TO OUST RAY.

2. THE MORE WE HEAR ABOUT THIS AFFAIR THE CLEARER IT BECOMES THAT IT IS PERSONALITIES RATHER THAN ISSUES THAT ARE AT STAKE PRIMARILY. SANJAY IS OUT TO GET RAY, AVOWEDLY BECAUSE OF RAY'S "MISHANDLING" LAST YEAR OF MRS. GANDHI'S CASE BEFORE THE ALLAHABAD HIGH COURT BUT IN FACT (IT IS ALLEGED) BECAUSE OF RAY'S SLIGHTS TO SANJAY AND REFUSAL TO FOLLOW SANJAY'S DIRECTIVES AS PASSED ALONG BY KAMAL NATH, SANJAY'S SCHOOL BUDDY AND CHIEF OPERATOR HERE. NATH HAS SPONSORED GHANI KHAN CHAUDHURY, GOWB MINISTER FOR POWER AND IRRIGATION, WHO IS SAID RECENTLY TO HAVE AWARDED A VERY LARGE CONTRACT TO NATH'S FIRM (NATH MANUFACTURES POWER CABLE), FIRST AS REPLACEMENT FOR RAY, AND WHEN THAT FAILED AS A MEMBER OF THE PROPOSED OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (RUMOR IS THAT CHAUDHURY HAD SANJAY'S APPROVAL FOR THE JOB OF CM BUT MRS. GANDHI REJECTED HIM BECAUSE HE IS A MOSLEM AND SHE DID NOT WANT MOSLEMS AS CMS OF BORDER STATES). BEYOND THIS, ONE GETS INTO W TANGLE OF GRUDGES, JEALOUSIES AND RIVALRIES ALONG THE LEADING PERSONALITIES AND FACTIONS IN THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS THAT MAKES THE WHOLE THING SOUND TRIVIAL AND SORDID.

3. TO THE EXTENT THAT ISSUES HAVE PLAYED A ROLE, IT HAS BEEN SECONDARY. THE ISSUE TO WHICH ALLUSION HAS SPECIFICALLY BEEN MADE IN PUBLIC IS THAT OF THE PARTY'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTATION OF VARIOUS ITEMS IN THE 20 POINT PROGRAM. MOITRA HAS CHARGED THAT RAY HAS CUT THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS OUT FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE LAND REFORM AND DISTRIBUTION AND OTHER PROGRAMS. THE CHARGE IS TRUE; RAY HAS KEPT THESE PROGRAMS IN THE HANDS OF THE BUREAUCRACY. BUT IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER THE PARTY REALLY WANTED OR WAS ABLE TO TAKE PART IN SUCH ACTIVITIES IN A MEANINGFUL WAY; THEIR MAIN INTEREST SEEMS TO LIE IN USING THE PROGRAMS TO DISTRIBUTE FAVORS TO PARTY OFFICERS AND FAITHFUL, A CORRUPTION

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 13792 171525Z

WHICH RAY IN TURN HAS SOUGHT TO AVOID, PRECISELY BY KEEPING THE PROGRAMS IN THE HANDS OF THE BUREAUCRACY. THE ISSUE THAT NO ONE HAS MENTIONED PUBLICLY BUT WHICH WE ARE TOLD IS A SERIOUS SOURCE OF GRIEVANCE AGAINST RAY WITHIN THE PARTY ARE THE NUMEROUS ARRESTS OF PARTY OFFICIALS THAT HAVE BEEN PERFORMED ON RAY'S ORDER, FOR CORRUPTION, GOONDAISM, AND PROBABLY ALSO SOME FOR OPPOSITION OR PERSONAL REASONS OF RAY'S OWN. WE ARE TOLD THAT THERE ARE SOME 300 CONGRESSMEN OF ONE RANK OR ANOTHER CURRENTLY

IN JAIL IN WEST BENGAL. ONE OF THE FIRST TASKS OF THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE, IN THE VIEW OF ITS PROPONENTS, WOULD BE TO REVIEW EACH OF THESE MEN'S CASES AND SET AS MANY AS POSSIBLE FREE.

4. SO IT APPEARS THAT THE STRUGGLE SHAPING UP ON SATURDAY WILL BE LESS OVER RAY'S CONTINUATION IN OFFICE--WHICH IS NOW MORE OR LESS ACCEPTED--THAN AROUND THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE AND WHO WOULD HEAD IT. BUT THIS MAY BE JUST ANOTHER WAY OF RAISING THE QUESTION OF THE CHIEF MINISTER'S CONTINUATION, FOR BOTH HIS SUPPORTERS AND HIS ADVERSARIES THINK THAT IF HE FINDS HIMSELF SHACKLED WITH SUCH A GROUP HEADED BY OM MEHTA, OR FOR THAT MATTER BY ANYONE OTHER THAN HIMSELF, HE MIGHT RESIGN.

SIGNED KORN

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